

Carson National Forest

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News

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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MINIMIZING WILDFIRE DANGER

January 6, 2006, Taos, New Mexico - On Saturday, December 31, 2005 a fire was reported near Highway 578, 4 miles south of Red River. This three quarter acre fire was started by improperly disposing of stove ashes. The lack of moisture, warm daytime temperatures and afternoon winds has spelled out a message of concern over the increased fire danger. The fires these past few weeks in Southeastern New Mexico, Texas and Oklahoma are an indication of the potentially destructive and unpredictable nature of fire behavior. Ordinarily we do not think about fire danger at this time of the year but along with the lack of moisture, last winter's moisture increased the concentration of grasses and other fine flashy fuels in all terrain at all elevations. Fine fuels burn rapidly and are sensitive to small changes in wind and relative humidity. A stand of one foot tall grass can easily produce 12-18 foot flames in a normal afternoon with winds of 6 – 15 mph. The Red River fire department saw 8 foot flame lengths.

The combined long term drought, vegetation mortality from insect damage and heavy accumulation of forest litter and other fine fuels are all contributing factors to what can easily become a very active and early fire season. The Pine Canyon Complex Fire, in El Rito this past September which burned 3,918 acres outside what is considered our "normal" fire season is another example of unusual fire behavior. Under these conditions, a small spark or low temperature heat source can easily ignite an unwanted wildfire. A few of the most obvious sources of sparks include cigarettes, matches, stove and fire place ashes, trash or agricultural burning. Preventing the spark is our best cure for stopping these wildfires.

Any activity which reduces the amount to dry grass and weeds on your property will reduce both the spread and heat damage from a wildfire. Protect your home and other structures such as barns, propane tanks and sheds by mowing or clearing all grass and weeds to a minimum of 30 feet on all sides. The grass should be mowed or cut as low as possible and the clippings should be raked and discarded. Proper removal of the lower limbs of trees and shrubs so branches do not touch the ground is also helpful. If your property is adjacent to a road consider removing the grass to approximately 10 feet from the roadway to reduce the possibility of vehicle caused fires. A garden hose that reaches around you home is important and should be stored in winter to avoid freezing.

The devastation caused by the hurricanes this past fall has also alerted us to the need for personal preparedness. The concept of preparing an emergency survival kit, a backpack or suit case with copies of all important papers, three days worth of clothing, food and water is something that should become standard in every home. The fire in Hobbs this past weekend destroyed 11 homes. These residents were asked to evacuate with no time look for insurance papers or other important items.

The Carson National Forest in an effort to reduce the heavy fuel loadings will continue to conduct prescribed burns when conditions are at acceptable levels. With everyone being aware and prepared, the likelihood of unwanted wildfires can be minimized.

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